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MODERN CONFUCIAN SYNTHESIS OF QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE KNOWLEDGE: XIONG SHILI 熊十力

INTRODUCTION

Xiong Shili 熊十力 (1885–1968) belongs to the relatively small number of philosophers, who opposed the anti-Confucian tendencies, which prevailed during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Since the May Fourth Movement in 1919, Confucianism has been blamed for China's weakness and decline in the face of Western aggression. The mainstream of Chinese intellectuals believed that the salvation of China as an integrated nation urgently required the introduction of Western science and democracy. Against this dominant intellectual trend, however, another voice disputed the claim that Confucianism was the reason for China's Crisis and argued that, on the contrary, the underlying problem was the loss of the authentic Confucian *dao*. Accordingly, the way out was not to abandon Confucianism, but to rediscover and revive its real spirit. The main representative of this voice in contemporary Chinese philosophy was Xiong Shili.¹

Xiong was the originator and founder of Modern Confucianism (*xin ruxue* 新儒學) as well as one of the first Chinese philosophers, who developed his own system of thought, which was based upon classical Confucian concepts and, at the same time, adjusted to the conditions of the New Era.

In his work, this modernized tradition has been above all reflected in the fields of ontology, ethics, and epistemology.

I. THE SYNTHESIS OF SUBSTANCE (*TI* 體) AND FUNCTION (*YONG* 用)

After his switch in ideas from Buddhism to Confucian thought, Xiong Shili created a new cosmological system in accordance with the foundations of traditional Chinese holistic world view. The central

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categorical pattern he applied was the method of traditional complementary dialectic, as has also been reflected in almost all currents of Confucian thought. After his ideological switch from Buddhism, Xiong ignored the Buddhist standpoint of a strict division between absolute, unchangeable reality of dharma nature (*faxing* 法性) and inconstant world of phenomena or dharma appearances (*faxiang* 法相). In his opinion, such conceptual separation was typical for most of philosophies and can be found not only in Indian and Buddhist, respectively, but also in Western and Chinese traditions. In Western philosophy it manifests itself in the elementary distinction between ultimate reality (*noumenon*) and phenomena (*phenomenon*), which can be found particularly in the Platonic tradition. This separation has been reflected in the fields of linguistics (subject and predicate), psychology (soul and body, reason and emotion), epistemology (opinion and knowledge, sensations and rational analysis), as well as in the field of metaphysics (integrity and incompleteness, eternity and transitoriness, true and false). In Chinese tradition such differentiation has been expressed in Neo-Confucian dualisms in the sense of dividing the spheres of structure (*li* 理) and vital energy (*qi* 氣) sphere.

In his argumentation, Xiong Shili made use of many traditional Confucian concepts. So he names the absolute, (objective existent) reality *ti* (substance), and the changeable world of appearances by the analogous term *yong* (function), which has in the context of Chinese tradition always served as a bipolar opposition of substance.

In his absorbing treatise on this basic concept,² Chung-ying Cheng points out various difficulties connected to the problems of translation, exposing that

[O]n its most elementary level, *ti* is the concrete corporeal body that a person possesses, the entity in which human life is maintained and developed. But *ti* is not simply a matter of organization of physical elements. Instead, it is a structure and system of organic functions and vital spirit in the vehicle of the physical body. It may be said that by virtue of the form of the physical body, *ti* realizes its living spirit and vitality, and by virtue of the living spirit and vitality, the physical body maintains its organic unity and organization.³

Thus, he also proposes the notions of *organic system* and *embodiment*, respectively to express the semantic scope of this concept. In this article, however, the term *ti* is expressed as substance, since there is well-established usage of substance and function for *ti* and *yong*.

In accordance with the principle of complementarities, which has been expressed already in the *Yijing* 《易經》,⁴ Xiong emphasizes the elementary entirety of this complementary bipolar conceptual pair.

Substance is a term, which constitutes itself in the relation to the function. But, as a matter of fact, substance is an all-embracing function; it represents a manifestation of the totality of all particularities of function. Although we can say, that substance is a substance of function, it therefore does not mean, that it was an independent entity, which could exceed function or could exist somewhere outside it. Just because substance is the very substance of function, it cannot be found out of it.”⁵

Xiong’s holism is more authentic and more consequent as the Neo-Confucian, especially Cheng Yi’s and Zhu Xi’s treating of the principle of bipolarity, which (in spite of the basic inseparability and of mutual conditionality of both conceptual poles) emphasizes a rather strict separation of vital energy (*qi*) and structure (*li*), and which thus already drew close to idealistic dualisms of Western type.

In our perception (and hence within language) we tend to treat substance and function as two different entities; but according to Xiong, both concepts solely represent two sides of the same medal. The domain, which shows itself as substance (*ti*), cannot be directly perceived in a sense of concrete physical form, because the latter manifest themselves exclusively within the domain of function (*yong*).

Besides, substance is also the cause or reason of all transformations, whereby the function is that very moment, which performs them at the level of concrete actuality. Substance is latent and subtle, whereby function is explicit and manifest. While substance is a single unity, function is manifold and multilayered. But all these differences can only be expressed on a descriptive level.⁶ In a more elementary sense, substance and function are not two different things with different natures, but only one single entity, which represents itself through different qualities. Thus, substance and function constitute a unity.

If one talks about function, function is not something other than original reality.⁷ Otherwise, we might have to find another foundation for function. Xiong here assumes any function must presuppose a foundation and hence to separate function from original reality will result in a regress “ad infinitum.” Correspondingly, if one talks about original reality, it is not something other than function. Otherwise, original reality would not involve any change and transformation and therefore would be empty or void.⁸

Although there is only one, single substance (*ti*), it therefore manifests itself in everything that exists (i.e., in “ten thousand things, *wan wu* 萬物”). When it shows itself explicitly, we perceive it precisely in this manifoldness, which can be—according to Xiong and to ancient Chinese tradition—named function (*yong*). Thus, function is a manifold manifestation of substance.

Xiong Shili tried to illustrate the relation between substance and function by the metaphor of an ocean; he saw the wholeness of the sea as its substance and its waves as its function.

All the water of the entire ocean manifests itself in the multitude of foaming waves. Thus, we cannot seek its water outside of these waves. Every single wave, which springs out of this muddled, foaming multitude, is composed by water; not a single one could exist independently, without the water of the ocean.⁹

As distinguished from the Buddhist view, which saw the world of phenomena, that is, dharma appearances, as an illusionary dimension of false, secular attachments, that have to be surpassed, if we want to unite ourselves with the eternal truth of being within dharma nature, Xiong believed, that both, substance as well as function, were actual existing in reality. Precisely, this Buddhist deviation from the conditions of concrete being, their negation of the meaning of manifold variety of life, was the very reason for Xiong's aversion for Buddhism. By redefining and systematizing traditional paradigms of holistic ontology, Xiong simultaneously erected theoretical foundations of a new Confucian pragmatism; once again he emphasized and actualized the well-known Confucian responsibility for a life in concrete social actuality. His turning away from Buddhist cosmology has also been clearly expressed in his understanding of statics and dynamics of being. The Buddhists perceive the absoluteness of dharma nature as eternal and unchangeable reality, while for them the dynamics of change is only sets of flashes, belonging to (actually nonexisting) qualities of deceptive world from the sphere of dharma appearances (*faxiang*).

For Xiong Shili, however, the transformation of being has not been limited solely to the sphere of appearances, that is, to the sphere of function (*yong*); at the same time, it also represents the basic state of substance (*ti*) of all beings. (At this point, as well, we can discover the influence of proto-philosophic classic the *Book of Changes*《易經》in Xiong Shili's work.) The substance is immaterial in itself; matter, which is, similar to form, a quality of function, arises from the process of a never-ending change, which represents a continual state of both aspects of being. The dynamic process of transformation manifests itself in the impulses of alternative contracting and stretching, or opening and closing of substance. These impulses define the forming and elapsing of phenomena, which manifest themselves as its function. Xiong's contemporaries, which were, to a great part, more focused upon the works of Western philosophy, as upon new discoveries of Chinese tradition, often tried to find parallelisms of his work and Western philosophic discourses.¹⁰

Xiong believed that the essential difference between his own, modern Confucian ontology and Western interpretations could be found in different perception of the Western concept of “objective reality” on the one side, and his own understanding of the “substance” (*ti*): while “objective reality” for Western philosophers meant an “external” entity, approachable through rational constructions, the substance in Xiong’s sense was not only the elementary reason for existence, but also represented at the same time the very core of any existence,¹¹ for it could be simultaneously identified with the individual spirit (or with individual consciousness) of every single individual.

What is important to note is that *yong* as an action of a person is based on free choice of the person, for a person could contradict the advice or judgment and act contrarily, which would bring him misfortune. The *yong* of a situation, which is the *ti* for the *yong*, hence is both based on our understanding of the *ti*-situation and based on our ability to choose the right course of action, as both action and non-action could be said to be the function of the situation, which is the *ti* for the *yong*. Which course of action (or nonaction) one would take depends on free choice based on understanding or insight into the *ti*-situation. It is in understanding the *ti* that one sees the possibilities of development and causation. But a *yong*, or function, is a function not just because it is rooted in the *ti*, but because it is conducive to our desirable purpose.¹²

In any case, Xiong hereby weighty elaborated some central paradigms of Neo-Confucian ontology in such a manner, that he connected them with original Confucian thought, which was based upon the principle of bipolar complementarities. Although substance, which is of bipolar nature itself, and function, which incorporates substantiality as well as all its divergent forms constitute a mutually dependent, total unity, the all-embracing and inexpressible substance was still understood as more original and primary in relation to its functional forms of materialization.

II. FROM HABITUATED MIND (*XIXIN* 習心) AND ORIGINAL (*BENXIN* 本心) MIND TO QUANTITATIVE UNDERSTANDING (*LIANGZHI* 量智) AND QUALITATIVE (*XINGZHI* 性智) UNDERSTANDING

In its core, Xiong’s theory of knowledge arises from the traditional system of Confucian epistemology and is as such tightly connected with ethics. The bridge, which links both discourses together, is the unity of heaven and man. As already mentioned, Xiong is following the presumption, that the substance of being (*ti*) was identical to human mind (*xin* 心). Thus, the only way, which leads to the recogni-

tion of substance (i.e., the objective reality and simultaneously the absolute meaning of being), is to realize one's own spirit. In this process of comprehension, the individual cultivates his/her personality and refines his/her virtues at the same time.

Xiong's basic ontological thesis about the unity of substance and function is therefore logically also reflected in his theory of mind. Human beings possess two kinds of mind or consciousness: the first one, which corresponds to the cosmic substance, Xiong denominates as original mind (*beixin* 本心).

First: this kind of mind is empty, solitary and tranquil. I call it empty, because it has neither a form, nor an image. I call it solitary and tranquil, because it is detached from the confusions of nature.
 . . . Second: this mind is bright and waking. I call it bright, because it abandoned the darkness. I call it waking, because it is not fallible. Because it is bright and waking, it is without knowledge and knows everything at the same time. I say it is without knowledge, for it is free from false, illusionary differentiations. But, at the same, it illuminates the substance of all particular entities, which is the origin of any knowledge; therefore I say that it knows everything.¹³

The other type of mind, which, according to Xiong's ontological paradigms, corresponds to function, he names the habituated mind (*xixin* 習心).

The habituated mind originates from the spirit of forms and substantiality. It is a function, which arises from original mind and which can only manifest itself through sense organs. On the other hand, the sense organs also use it as their sensibleness; therefore I call it the spirit of forms and of substantiality. The habituated mind is to be found in the change of beings, and is therefore mutually suspended and dependent on everything. Because it has no ability to surpass or to control this level of beings, it remains captured into their chaos.¹⁴

The habituated mind is essentially illusionary, just like the world of phenomena, to which it corresponds. But, because in our everyday life, the human representative ability is limited and linked to particular individual selves, we tend to experience the habituated mind as it was real, just as real as the concrete things we perceive through it.

Common people usually don't acknowledge the existence of their original mind. Instead, they are aware only of the mind, which is connected to various contradictions of everyday life. They regard this paradox mind as a real one. This is an erroneous prejudice of the same kind, as to define the external world as identical to substance. Nevertheless, we have to know, that none of them—neither the mind, attached to contradictions of everyday world, nor any kind of knowledge, arising from it—has an independent substance.¹⁵

The original mind of an individual corresponds according to Xiong with his/her original, true “nature” (*xing* 性). The habituated mind has

been defined by specific conditions of life, which confront humans through their cognition, their will, and through their emotions. While the first one implies meaning and is directly linked to the actuality of being as entirety, the latter functions under the presumption of dividing consciousness and external world and has at the same time been burdened by egocentric prejudices and by shallow, false wishes. While the habituated mind serves as a tool, which helps us to survive in the world of concrete phenomena, the recognition or experience of original mind, as well as of its identity with the substance of being, is helping us to fulfill this survival with meaning and sense. The presumption of a human need to gain meaning of life, which should distinguish men from animals, is of extreme importance in all Confucian discourses. The way, which leads to this meaning, or the method of inquiry, which enables us to experience our unity with the substance of being, is to be found, according to Xiong, in the method of introspective self-reflection.

First, the human mind and original reality are not separate; and secondly, original reality must be grasped through reflection on what is in the human mind. Both theses are basic Confucian doctrines.¹⁶

Parallel to bipolar concepts of substance and function, or to original and habituated mind, Xiong, in his theory of knowledge, also created a differentiation between two different concepts of cognizance. The first one manifests itself through the category of qualitative understanding (*xingzhi*), which constitutes an epistemological analogy with substance and with original mind, respectively.

The original mind can also be called qualitative understanding, for it is the basic nature of the existential unity of self and all beings.¹⁷

Qualitative understanding is awareness of self. The real self in this sense can be called substance. . . . It is the fundamental reason of my existence. In my theory of knowledge, this real self means awareness or consciousness, and is also called quantitative understanding. Although this kind of awareness is not separated from sensual experiences, it doesn't stop at the level of sensual experience; moreover, it eternally exists independently, outside all the systems.¹⁸

The second type of understanding, which corresponds to the function of qualitative understanding and to habituated mind, respectively, Xiong named quantitative understanding (*liangzhi*).¹⁹

The quantitative understanding is to think, to conclude or to analyze the principles of things. It refers to the pragmatic valuation of everything that is done or that happens. Thus, although it is named quantitative understanding, it could also be named reason. This kind of understanding is originally a function of qualitative understanding; it

provides the latter with particular distinctions. Since quantitative understanding is therefore the function of the qualitative understanding, it depends on sensual organs, and they also need it to function.²⁰

Contemporary Chinese interpreters of Xiong's philosophy, Guo Jianning and Zhang Wenru believe that his concept of quantitative understanding was identical with scientific methods:

The most important functions of quantitative understanding are reasoning and inference; hence it represents an interpretative tool for science. Although quantitative understanding has been seen as function of qualitative understanding, it is "lost in chasing things" and "seized in contradictions of external world," it seeks power and cannot get to the heart of the matter.²¹

In the next developmental step of his epistemological system Xiong Shili linked quantitative understanding with scientific comprehension, and qualitative understanding with philosophical or metaphysical paradigms. In this way, he tried to redefine the relation between Confucianism and modern science.

Quantitative understanding is namely based upon the logic of differentiation; it is rational and linked to experience. Qualitative understanding, however, has been constituted in the inner process of intuitive experience, which tends to unite itself with the original mind and to discover the reality, which is a part of it.

Quantitative understanding is a suitable and effective tool, which can be used to investigate concrete actuality that defines our everyday life. However, we have to be aware of its limits and to take care not also to use it as a cognitive instrument for understanding of ontological and metaphysical paradigms. This would namely mean a reduction of the substance of being to a function of an external object of cognizance. Thus, Xiong, similar to Feng Youlan, draws attention to the need of a separation between science and metaphysics.

Xiong suggests that ontology becomes a controversial matter mainly because both its practitioners and its critics deal with it in terms of calculative understanding. This limit that Xiong sets for science strongly echoes Kant's "*Critique of Pure Reason*" . . . and also has parallels to Heidegger's treatment of technology.²²

Still, Xiong Shili's epistemological treatises differ essentially from Kant's. Xiong is throughout emphasizing, that the substance (*ti*) in the sense of absolute reality can be recognized. He follows the presumption, that this ultimate truth is not an entity, to be situated outside of (and independent) from our consciousness. The essential core of Xiong's ontology can be uncovered through the comprehension of one's own self. The original substance is hidden in every one of us;

thus it does not float somewhere over the exterior sphere of some objectivity. Thus, Xiong's truth is by no means an independent external object, waiting to be uncovered and controlled by cognitive techniques of our reason. The way, which leads to its recognition, is the path self-reflective recognition (*fanji tiren* 反己體認) or reflective introspection (*fanqiu zishi* 反求自識); while we drown deep down into ourselves, the true substance of being uncovers itself spontaneously.

When we are thus aware of ourselves, there are no more boundaries between subject and object, inside or outside, or identity and difference. In this inner recognition of self everything is bright and clear, and the all-embracing chaos of ignorance disappears of its own accord.²³

According to Xiong Shili, the introspective method of comprehension is nothing else but the experience of original mind by inner intuition, that is, by the application of qualitative understanding.

Xiong's theory of nature understanding²⁴ is much influenced by the Buddhist method of "sitting in meditation" and by Wang Yangmings method of extending one's innate knowledge.²⁵ However, in contrast to the presuppositions of these methods, Xiong insisted that the manifestation of the original mind is not an act once and for all. Rather it is a process of constant transformation.²⁶

Since this transformation has been directed, the mind, according to Xiong, also implies the element of will, which at the same time is the basis of the self.²⁷ The refinement of will through cultivation of personality (*xiushen* 修身) represents, for Xiong, the basic precondition of any harmonic society.

While describing his method of comprehension, Xiong also dealt with the problem of transmitting. In the context of his traditional bipolar conceptual scheme he was here applying the Buddhist terms of latent (*zhequan* 遮詮) and manifest (*biaoquan* 表詮) interpretation.

According to these theories, manifest interpretation is the one that directly expresses the thing or the principle, which is to be interpreted. The latent interpretation does not apply any direct expressions, but tries to lead us to self enlightenment by smashing the paradoxicality of false images, which confound human mind.²⁸

The manifest interpretation is positive and expresses the properties of the explained object in an immediate way. The latent one is negative and is focused to expressions of that, which is *not* the object of explanation, that is, to expositions of its nonexistent qualities and functions, respectively.

Among all philosophic schools, which developed various methods of comprehension and interpretation, the method of latent interpre-

tation was most often applied by Buddhists of Mahayana—School. They developed this method as a counterpart to rational patterns of explanation, which deform the transmission of all-embracing truth, because the specific structure of these patterns tends to treat it as an external object. According to Xiong, the method of manifest interpretation is suitable to explain and to transmit partial cognition or partial truths, which one can seize during the process of inquiring the external actualities. Since the substance of being as such is not transmittable, and because language can never fully express the meaning, (*yan bu jinyi* 言不盡意), the transmission of real truth can only be accomplished by the method of latent interpretation.

III. SCIENCE AND INTUITION

In contrast to the general trend, which prevailed within the few numbered remaining representatives of the conservative group, who still tried to defend the Confucian doctrine, Xiong never rejected the scientific approach as such. On the contrary, he advocated the standpoint that science was of great importance as an instrument, which presented progress and prosperity for humanity. On the contrary, he believed, that science also represented new possibilities for the improvement of conditions for individual cultivation of personalities, which, again, could have had a positive impact on the harmonization of the society as a whole. Both, the cultivation of personality as well as egoism and false wishes were equally possible products of progress and prosperity. Therefore, Xiong viewed science as a strong and influential tool, which had to be used very carefully and with full ethical responsibility. The second danger in connection with science for him was the fragmentariness of its epistemological approaches in the research of reality. Hence, scientific research had—according to Xiong—always to refer solely to habituated mind and to apply exclusively the method of quantitative understanding. If we therefore try to carry out scientific research, referring to the entireness of reality, we will cause by that a dispersion or fragmentation of our original mind. This danger could likewise lead to the lost of ethical directions, that precondition the meaning of our life. In this way, we could overlook the signposts, showing the way to the cultivation of our personality and to refinement of our virtues, hence we could get lost at the crossroads of our superficial instincts and desires.

Since science as such could not solve the problem of the meaning of human life, it had to be subordinated to philosophical valuation of comprehension. Thus, Xiong Shili's acceptance and defense of science was based on his conviction, that it represented an efficient tool of

comprehension, which functioned in the context of a completely different discourse than philosophy, which was competent for ethics and metaphysics. Of course, the fragmentary nature of quantitative understanding as such did not necessarily mean, that people, who dealt with it, automatically lost sense and general ethical measures of their life. Equally, science as such did not necessarily lead to spiritual poverty in the sense of prevailing material desires and commercial passions.

In their metaphysics, the Confucians applied the method of inner, subjective comprehension, while they emphasized concrete knowledge in the empiric sphere. The contribution of the method of subjective comprehension is that it can lead knowledge; it prevents knowledge from remaining limited to particularities and enables it to gain essential dimensions of depth and wholeness. On the other hand, the contribution of concrete knowledge is that it can complete the subjective comprehension and prevent the subject from sinking into the duskiness of deepest emptiness, in which the entirety of truth would disperse to nothing.²⁹

Besides, Xiong emphasized, that the scientific discourse itself was not defined solely by analysis, but also by synthesis; even intuition played a great part within it.³⁰ As already mentioned, the prevention of its “negative side effects” could be realized by ethically refined metaphysics. In his opinion, the relation between science and philosophy was complementary. The relation between them was equal to the relation between substance and function.

Nevertheless, Xiong thoroughly stressed the fact, that the scientific thought and its approach to reality was limited by certain boundaries. Those boundaries were not to be surpassed; although the relation between science and philosophy was mutual, for him, the philosophical (especially the metaphysical) discourse was still more important and more basic.

I did never oppose rational reasoning. It is very important, when dealing with and researching concrete specific features of all that exists. The exhaustive study of them can lead us to their unification. By observing and applying general principles we can manage to comprehend a great number of tiniest parts of variegated actuality. From discovering the smallest details of concrete world we can, again, conclude to the nature of their unified entity. . . . However, the applicability of rational reasoning cannot be widened into infinity. After completing the recognition of principles, we necessarily arrive to their final stage, at which reasoning is of no use anymore. Every metaphysician should be aware of this fact.³¹

Here, we encounter a logical derivation of a specific view of the principle of complementarities, as has been typical for Xiong's entire philosophy. Every relation of bipolar conceptual pairs implies, in spite of their mutual interdependence, a primary pole, by which this inter-

dependence is defined, directed and even enabled. In the relation between substance and function it is the first, in the relation between habituated and original mind the latter pole. And just like the qualitative understanding defines and directs the quantitative, philosophy should define and direct science. Therefore, Xiong strongly opposed the tendency toward a scientific treatment of traditional Chinese philosophy, which was widely spread in intellectual circles of his time. The stream of new pragmatism, which we already encountered in Hu Shi's, as well as in Feng Youlan's, work, was mainly trying to create a scientific methodology and systematic classification that could apply to Chinese traditional philosophic discourse. The results of this theoretical work were meant to replace former philosophic mysticism and to set up a systematic, logical consistent and surveyable formal framework, which could comprise classical Chinese systems of thought, based on the principle of immanent metaphysics.

For the "New intellectuals," even more important was a scientific treatment of traditional discourses in a sense of establishing a logically grounded methodology of contemporary theories. According to them, scientific epistemological approaches should completely replace the methods of intuition, introspection and experience of innate aspects of consciousness. Xiong opposed this tendency mainly because he viewed philosophy as a discourse, which differs from the scientific one in regard to substance, as well as in regard to function. While the first one is dealing with formal and mechanistic approach (as well as with effective and applicable treatment) of reality, the latter one is important in its role of basic ethical criteria, which should define every respective research. A completely formalized epistemology of science could, according to Xiong, not serve as a measure of judgments or valuations of social reality.

IV. RETURN TO THE DIALECTICS OF ETHICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY: THE INNER SAGE AND THE EXTERNAL RULER

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Xiong Shili's epistemology basically arose from his need to create or reconstruct the theoretical (especially ontological and metaphysical) foundations of Confucian ethics. Above all, his system was meant as a framework, which could serve as a theoretical proof of classical Confucian methods of comprehension, in which the self-reflective cultivation of personality necessarily leads to the experience of classical virtues of humanity or mutuality (*ren* 仁). Precisely, the experience of these virtues represented, for Xiong, the very basis for China's salvation from the all-encompassing political crisis at the door-sill of the twentieth century.

Following his thesis about the inseparateness of substance and function, Xiong created an ethical system, based upon the classical Confucian postulate of the nobleman (*junzi* 君子), which was seen as the inner sage (*neisheng* 內聖) and the external ruler (*waiwang* 外王). The concept of inner sage refers to his spiritual adjustment, while the concept of external ruler has a bearing of his social and political activities. This moral directive, which was expressed by the ancient phrase *neisheng waiwang* 內聖外王, sprang out from classical Confucian political theories.³² However, precisely in this respect Xiong criticized the classical Confucianism, especially the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties. He reproached their theories with exaggerated emphasis of the principle of inwardness and with ignorance of social and epistemological aspects of this phrase.

Xiong Shili believed, that traditional Confucianism, especially the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties, always laid too much stress to the “doctrine of the Inner sage,” while they tend to overlook or not to pay enough attention to the “doctrine of the External ruler.” That means, that they only emphasized the aspect of moral education and cultivation, while overlooking the concepts of “exploring things” and of “highest knowledge” in the scientific sense. This lead to China’s regression in comparison to the West, as well as to its present critical position, defined by passivity and subordination.³³

To fulfill this deficiency, Xiong followed the paradigms of his holistic ontology and established the thesis of the “unity of the inner sage and the external ruler (*neisheng waiwang buer* 內聖外王不二),” in order to construct a basis for the ethical system of a new, modernized Confucianism. The respective part of his theory, which refers to the formerly overlooked aspects of the synthesis of ethics and epistemology, is to be found under the title *The Theory of the External Ruler* (*Waiwang Zhi Xue* 外王之學). It is composed by political and philosophical essays, which mainly deal with the social importance of natural sciences as well as of social and political theories. In this respect, Xiong’s main goal was to reinstate the classical Confucian utopia in a contemporary guise. The new society he strove for was meant to be an independent, free, equal, prosperous, and democratic society of great harmony.

However, Xiong’s significance is not limited to his modernization of the classical Confucian discourse of ethical epistemology, that is, in his attempts to integrate the function of modern, above all natural science and its epistemology into the traditional systems of thought and valuation. He has not been important only as establisher of metaphysical, ethical, and epistemological foundations of Modern Confucianism:

Xiong's work cannot be dismissed because it is out of the mainstream of contemporary ethics. Rather, we should take Xiong seriously, because doing so might inspire us to re-examine the contemporary discussion of virtue. If we find difficulties in Xiong's own account of the metaphysical basis of virtue, we might be moved to seek a better metaphysics rather than to abandon metaphysics of virtue entirely.³⁴

His contribution to the development of modern Chinese philosophy can also be demonstrated in a much broader, general sense. Xiong Shili, namely, also represents one of the first theoretically qualified intellectuals of his age, who didn't advocate the conservative elitist nationalism, but at the same time opposed the prevailing trends of iconoclastic negation of tradition. Even later on, during the predomination of the so-called communist ideologies, Xiong rather consequently persisted in his—for that time completely unacceptable—standpoints. Thus Xiong Shili, remaining a real Confucian scholar at a time, when Confucianism was everything else but the prevailing state doctrine, doubtless represents a real traditional sage. For him, Confucianism was not solely the predominating system of thought, to which he should formally conform in order to achieve the realization of some privileges and private interests. He was a Confucian scholar by following his own inner conviction, or, with other words, he was a Confucian "inner sage." Hereby, we encounter an extremely rare kind of Confucian scholars, namely of those, who did not remain limited to a paper-wrapped reproduction of idealistic principles of Confucian thought, but who also tried to perform them in their own life. Xiong's personal moral was the ethics of a Confucian scholar, who can be a gentle, subtle thinker and a steadfast, consequent rebel at the same time.

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ENDNOTES

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1. Jiyuan Yu, "Xiong Shili's Metaphysics of Virtue," in *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*, eds. Chung-ying Cheng and Nicholas Bunnin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 127–46.
2. Chung-ying Cheng, "On the Metaphysical Significance of *Ti* (Body–Embodiment) in Chinese Philosophy: *Benti* (Origin–Substance) and *Ti–Yong* (Substance and Function)," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 29, no. 2 (2002): 145–62.

3. Ibid., 145.
4. Xiong devoted a great deal of his research work to the *Book of Changes* and he published the results of this work in different academic articles; most of them can be found in the third book of Xiong's Collected Works: *Xiong Shili Lunzhu Ji Zhi San* 《熊十力論著集之三》(Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1996).
5. Xiong Shili 熊十力, *Xiong Shili Lunzhu Ji Zhi Yi* 《熊十力論著集之一》(Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1992), 362.
6. Yu, "Xiong Shili's Metaphysics of Virtue," 132.
7. Jiyuan Yu translates the concept *ti*, which has in the present article been translated with the term "substance," with the phrase "original reality."
8. Yu, "Xiong Shili's Metaphysics of Virtue," 133.
9. Xiong Shili, *Xiong Shili Lunzhu Ji Zhi Yi*, 41.
10. See Yu, "Xiong Shili's Metaphysics of Virtue," 137–38.
11. Ibid.
12. Cheng, "On the Metaphysical Significance of *Ti*," 154.
13. Xiong Shili, *Xiong Shili Lunzhu Ji Zhi Yi*, 251.
14. Ibid., 253.
15. Ibid., 278.
16. Yu, "Xiong Shili's Metaphysics of Virtue," 139.
17. Xiong Shili, *Xiong Shili Lunzhu Ji Zhi Yi*, 548.
18. Ibid., 249.
19. Despite of the same pronunciation we have to pay attention not to confuse Xiong's term *liangzhi* 量智 in the sense of quantitative understanding with the Neo-Confucian term *liang zhi* 良知, which means innate knowledge.
20. Xiong Shili, *Xiong Shili Lunzhu Ji Zhi Yi*, 249.
21. Guo Jianning 郭建寧 and Zhang Wenru 張文儒, *Zhongguo Xiandai Zhhexue* (Modern Chinese Philosophy) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chuban she, 2001), 323.
22. Ibid.
23. Xiong Shili, *Xiong Shili Lunzhu Ji Zhi Yi*, 253–54.
24. I.e., Quantitative understanding (*liangzhi* 量智).
25. I.e., *liang zhi* (良知).
26. Yu, "Xiong Shili's Metaphysics of Virtue," 141–42.
27. Ibid.
28. Xiong Shili, *Xiong Shili Lunzhu Ji Zhi Yi*, 299.
29. Xiong Shili, *Xiong Shili Lunzhu Ji Zhi San*, 143–44.
30. See Yu, "Xiong Shili's Metaphysics of Virtue," 141.
31. Xiong Shili, *Xiong Shili Lunzhu Ji Zhi Yi*, 357.
32. Zeng Qiyun, *Neisheng Waiwang—Jiedu Yi Dai Ruzong Zeng Guofan* 《內聖外王—解讀一代儒宗曾國藩》(Beijing: Zhongguo Dianying, 2009).
33. Guo Jianning and Zhang Wenru, *Zhongguo Xiandai Zhhexue* (Modern Chinese Philosophy), 330.
34. Yu, "Xiong Shili's Metaphysics of Virtue," 144.